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DE RUEHIN #0830/01 1650916
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
R 130916Z JUN 08
FM AIT TAIPEI
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 9164
INFO RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING 8359
RUEHHK/AMCONSUL HONG KONG 9590

UNCLAS AIT TAIPEI 000830

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DEPARTMENT FOR INR/R/MR, EAP/TC, EAP/PA, EAP/PD - NIDA EMMONS
DEPARTMENT PASS AIT/WASHINGTON

E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: [OPRC](#) [KMDR](#) [KPAO](#) [TW](#)
SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION: CROSS-STRAIT TALKS

¶1. Summary: Taiwan's print media June 13 gave significant coverage to the historic meetings between Taiwan's Straits Exchange Foundation (SEF) and China's Association for Relations across the Taiwan Strait (ARATS) on improved cross-Strait relations Thursday. All major Taiwan dailies front-paged the landmark handshake between SEF Chairman Chiang Pin-kun and his ARATS counterpart Chen Yunlin in Beijing Thursday and said that SEF and ARATS may consider setting up reciprocal offices to handle visa applications. In the meantime, news coverage continued to focus on the aftermath of a collision between a Taiwan fishing boat and a Japanese frigate near the Tiaoyutai islands Tuesday. Several papers also quoted a "Washington Post" report as saying that top U.S. officials have put the brakes on the arms package for Taiwan.

¶2. In terms of editorials and commentaries, an editorial in the pro-independence "Liberty Times" criticized the SEF-ARATS talks as black box negotiations and said the Taiwan people will never accept the results of such talks. An editorial in the pro-independence, English-language "Taipei Times" also remained skeptical of the SEF-ARATS talks and said Taiwan's sovereignty is at stake. An op-ed piece in the centrist, KMT-leaning "China Times," on the other hand, discussed Taiwan's internal concerns over the island's political and economic prospects once the dialogue between Taiwan and China becomes systematic. End summary.

A) "How Can the [Taiwan] People Accept [Results of] Black Box Talks [with China]?"

The pro-independence "Liberty Times" [circulation: 720,000] editorialized (6/13):

"... Peaceful developments across the Taiwan Strait as well as stability and prosperity in the Asia-Pacific region are not only the results welcomed by the 23 million people of Taiwan but also a long-term goal pursued by the island. Given such a basis, the Ma administration could have sought to reach an internal consensus [on the resumption of cross-Strait talks] in a discreet and orderly fashion first and then started negotiating [with Beijing] based on the consensus. During the entire process [of pushing for the resumption of cross-Strait dialogue], it is the responsibility of a ruling and accountable government to pay equal attention to proper procedures and rule of law. But as a state leader, [Ma] simply used statements like 'the people have been waiting for eight long years' to respond to straightforward criticism from the outside saying that the new administration has been acting too hastily [on the cross-Strait issue]. Such a mentality [of the Ma administration] will surely result in [chaotic] policy and personnel arrangements ... and will thus put Taiwan in a dangerous situation. ..."

B) "Sovereignty at Stake in Beijing"

The pro-independence, English-language "Taipei Times" [circulation: 30,000] editorialized (6/13):

"... This time the talks are being held in Beijing, a factor that is itself full of symbolism. Not holding the talks on neutral ground,

as happened in the past, gives China the chance to frame events as it desires. The venue for the talks, the Diaoyutai State Guesthouse, is proof of this, as it is where the Chinese government houses visiting provincial government officials. Thus, Beijing can portray the talks as one of its provinces coming to pay tribute to the seat of power. All the talk about 'putting aside disputes over sovereignty' to create a 'win-win' situation for both sides is a red herring because if Taiwan is willing to overlook sovereignty just once, then it is setting a precedent for future talks. The only winner if this happens will be Beijing. ...

"Another consequence of this week's talks is that China fever is now in danger of developing into a full-scale epidemic, with county commissioners and city mayors now champing at the bit to cross the Strait and hobnob with their communist counterparts. Elected officials are lining up to ditch their titles to take part in economic activities and some are even willing to break the law to do so. ... The government must put its foot down soon and allow the Mainland Affairs Council (MAC) to exercise its authority if it is to prove wrong the doubters who said Lai Shin-yuan's appointment was just a publicity stunt. ... How can people trust a government that is prepared to stand up to Japan over the sovereignty of the Diaoyutais while at the same time cower to China?"

C) "Resumption of SEF-ARATS Negotiations; Beneficial Effects and Anxiety"

Tao Yi-feng, an associate professor of the Department of Political Science at National Taiwan University, opined in the centrist, KMT-leaning "China Times" [circulation: 400,000] (6/13):

"... In terms of politics, the resumption of negotiations between [Taiwan's] Straits Exchange Foundation (SEF) and [China's]

Association for Relations across the Taiwan Strait (ARATS) is based on the prerequisite that both sides accept the '1992 consensus.' Beijing is pleased to see Taiwan return to the 'one China' framework, while the KMT is only emphasizing the 'respective interpretations' part of the '1992 consensus.' However, it has become an obvious trend over the past decade that Taiwan's political and economic power is declining while Beijing's is increasing. In international society at present, no matter how Taiwan interprets the connotations of 'one China' -- be it 'one China is the Republic of China;' 'one China refers to a cultural China;' or 'one China refers to a China in the future' -- it has never been able to contend with Beijing's interpretation [of one China] (namely, 'there is only one China in the world; Taiwan is part of China, and the People's Republic of China is the only legitimate government of China). How to secure the sovereignty of the Republic of China during the reciprocal talks about status as a 'political entity' will be a question constantly asked of the KMT by the people and the opposition parties in Taiwan.

"In addition, the 'status quo' advocated by [President] Ma [Ying-jeou] -- 'no unification, no independence, no use of force' -- is actually a dynamic balance. If the current interests of big powers like China, the United States and Japan prefer that Taiwan maintain such a 'status quo,' these countries should act more proactively to help Taiwan maintain such a dynamic balance. After substantial progress has been made following the resumption of talks between SEF and ARATS, Taiwan should have more leeway to ask the United States and Japan to give Taiwan more support for Taiwan's participation in the international community. In this way, Taiwan will avoid falling into circumstances in which it can only unilaterally hope for Beijing's goodwill. ..."

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